The Chhau Dance of Mayurbhanj: II

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Mayurbhanj was the largest of the eighteen erstwhile princely states of Orissa, and became a part of the Indian Union on 1 January 1949. It is now a district in the state of Orissa with an area of 10,418 square kilometres, and is bounded on the north by the Singhbhum district of Bihar and the Midnapore district of West Bengal, on the south by the Balasore and Keonjhar districts of Orissa, on the east by Midnapore and Balasore districts, and on the west by Keonjhar and Singhbhum.

The Bhanjas of Orissa had ruled over the Mayurbhanj-Keonjhar region since the fourth century A.D. According to an early inscription[1] (*asanpat*) Satru Bhanja, son of Mana Bhanja, had even conquered territories up to present-day Guwahati and Patna. But the history of the Bhanja rulers of Mayurbhanj really starts with Kotta Bhanja, who was very likely the founder of the capital Khijjingakotta (now Khiching) during the last quarter of the ninth century. The name of the territory was then Khijjinga Mandala. The use of the Bhauma era in the Bhanja records of this period suggests that the early Bhanja rulers of Khijjingakotta were feudatories of the Bhauma kings who ruled over the coastal region of Orissa from the Ganga in the north to the Mahendra mountains in the south.

After the decline of the Bhaumas, the Bhanjas of Khijjinga Mandala became feudatories of the Somavamsi kings who ruled Utkala and Kosala. The Somavamsis were supplanted by the Gangas in the twelfth century, after which the Bhanjas became subordinate to the Gangas. Subsequently Mayurbhanj came under the suzerainty of Suryavamsi rulers, the Gajapatis, and remained thus until the British occupation in 1803.

Mayurbhanj took its name from the ruling families of the Mayuras and the Bhanjas. The Mayuras, according to records[2], ruled from Bonai Mandala (now Bonai in Sundergarh district of Orissa), and were contemporaries of the Bhanjas of Khijjingakotta. There were close political and cultural connections between these two ruling families. An inscription tells us that Dharani Varaha, a prince of the Mayura dynasty, and his wife Kirti had installed an image of Avalokiteshwara at Khijjingakotta during the rule of Raya Bhanja. In 1361, the capital of the Bhanja kings was destroyed by Sultan Firoz Shah and the Bhanjas moved to Haripur around 1400. By this time the Bhanjas had substituted their own royal emblem, the bull, with the peacock, the emblem of the Mayuras. Further, after moving their capital to Haripur, they named their kingdom Mayurbhanj, acknowledging the political alliance (or union) with the Mayuras. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, during the reign of Maharani Sumitra Devi, the capital of Mayurbhanj moved again from Haripur to Baripada[3].

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The Princely Patrons

The history of the present form of Chhau dance in Mayurbhanj starts from the time of Maharaja Krushna Chandra Bhanja Deo (r. 1868–1882). Till his accession to the *gadi*, Chhau dance was not associated with Chaitra Parva. The rudimentary Chhau—Amdalia-Jamdalia, Sadhan/Pharikhanda, Paikali—used to be performed by tribal groups visiting the palace in the month of Chaitra to pay their respects to the ruler[4].

On the last three days of Chaitra there were performances of Parava, which is the first item of Danda Nata, the dance associated with the popular Shaiva culture of Orissa. 'Parava' means radiance, here of the deity Parvati, who is propitiated with Shiva in the Danda Nata rituals. In this dance a man dances in the guise of the female deity. He wears a black sari flowing like a skirt from the waist, and a full-sleeve black jacket, and adorns himself with female ornaments made of brass. (The Ghanta Patua dancers also wear the same costume and ornaments.)

Though Parava is a solo dance when performed as part of Danda Nata, in Baripada it developed into a group dance. Dancers donned masks of various colours and wore a sort of halo (which is also called *parava*) made of bamboo and covered with strips of coloured cloth, mainly yellow, red, and black. This was strapped at the back of each dancer. There was a competition among the dancers of the two Sahis (zones of Baripada town): Dakshin Sahi, the part of the town south of the palace, and Uttar Sahi, that north of the palace. The younger brothers of Krushna Chandra, Brundaban Chandra and Gokul Chandra, were in charge of the *akhadas* of Uttar Sahi and Dakshin Sahi respectively. They were good dancers as well as teachers. The group which had the better, and the larger variety of masks and paravas was judged the winner of the competition.

Maharaja Krushna Chandra died young, of smallpox on 29 May 1882, when he was only thirty-four years old. But it was by his efforts that the Chhau dance of Mayurbhanj acquired its present form. He institutionalized the dance at Baripada and nurtured it with care and imagination. By the time he came to the *gadi*, Seraikella had already developed its own style of Chhau with elaborate masks, so he invited two Pharikhanda ustads (teachers) from Dhalbhum (in Seraikella), Upendra Biswal and Banamali Das, to settle in Mayurbhanj, offering them substantial land grants. Upendra Biswal was given lands in Kutchei village near Baripada and Banamali Das, a Brahmin, was settled in Kendumundi village. Krushna Chandra then attached these teachers to the akhadas of the two Sahis to train the dancers who were until then dancing Parava only.

The technique of the new dance of Mayurbhanj evolved from the prevalent rudimentary Chhau; refinements and innovations were gradually worked in in the Sahis[5]. Eventually the Sahis discarded the masked Parava dance altogether and concentrated on Chhau. This Chhau—the Mayurbhanj version—replaced Parava dance in the Chaitra Parva celebrations. As it had evolved from the martial arts of the region, most of the early dances were of a martial character. They were mainly performed by one, two, or four

dancers. Heroic characters from mythology—Mahadev, Parashuram, Indrajit, Kumbhakarna, etc., were introduced at a later stage. All the dances were with sword or bow or shield. Each dancer tried to prove his skill and dexterity[6].

After Krushna Chandra's death in 1882, the state came under the Court of Wards as the ruler's eldest son Rama Chandra was a minor. During this lean period the Chaitra Parva celebrations were barely kept alive.

Rama Chandra Bhanja came to the throne in 1890. Like his father, he evinced keen interest in the development of Chhau. Immediately after his accession, he reorganized the Sahi akhadas, and, again like his father, got his younger brothers Shyam Chandra and Dam Chandra to supervise the training of the dancers. Both the brothers took part in performances, and addressed themselves to training the dancers with care and discipline. During this period Rama Chandra Bhanja used to make an annual grant of Rs 2,000 to each Sahi. But his brothers spent much more on the dance—even up to Rs 15,000—from their personal funds[7]. There was keen competition between the dancers of the two Sahis, and also between the two brothers who invested their money and energy to prepare the groups. Both of them used to lodge their star performers in their own homes, personally supervising their diet and health. The training of dancers, rehearsals, composition of new dances (some with episodes from mythology), used to go on throughout the year. Old numbers were re-produced with greater refinement, and two or more new dances were added to the repertoire each year. These dances were considered to be the attractions of the Chaitra Parva celebrations of the year. An amount of Rs 800 was specially sanctioned for preparation of costumes for each new dance. This practice continued till the death of Rama Chandra Bhanja in 1912; he died of a bullet injury[8].

When George V, the British monarch, had visited India for the Delhi Durbar and come to Calcutta in 1912, Rama Chandra had presented the Paik dance of Mayurbhanj for the entertainment of the royal guests. The following account of this event is given in his biography, *Maharaja Sri Ramachandra Bhanja Deo: Feudatory Chief of Mayurbhanj*[9], by Sailendra Nath Sarkar and Charles Elliot:

> The programme of the Calcutta pageant on the occasion of the gracious visit of their Imperial Majesties to the city included a war dance by the Oriya Paiks, the organisation and management of which was entrusted to the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj as he had an expert knowledge of the Oriya national dances, and it was his people chiefly who were to take part in the war dance. The labour entailed in this was very great, as not only had the appropriate costumes and arms to be studied and arranged for, but the performers, many of whom were new recruits, had to be trained in their parts almost from the beginning. For months the Maharaja with indefatigable energy trained the men and personally attended the rehearsals which took place twice daily. It was a sight to see how he with his brother, the Rautrai Saheb, and his cousins laboured with the Paiks, giving them verbal and practical instructions in that difficult and intricate art which requires strenuous exercise of every limb and puts a great strain on

> the muscles. The result justified the great trouble and minute attention to detail given to the matter by the Chief. Sri Pradyot Kumar Tagore and Mr. Frank R. Lascelles, master of the pageant, attended the final rehearsal at Baripada and were highly pleased with the performance. Mr. Lascelles, who had great experience of all such ceremonies, remarked that it was the most interesting and lively item in the whole programme of the pageant. Later on their Imperial Majesties themselves expressed their satisfaction at the warlike performance of the Paiks, and the King Emperor made [a] special reference to this in his letter of the 24th February, 1912 to the Viceroy of India.

The Calcutta *Statesman* of 6 June 1912 reported: "The dance drew universal appreciation . . . The Oriya Paik dance was a great spectacle." Another Calcutta daily, the *Englishman*, wrote: "The war-dance of the Oriya Paiks, it is understood, was much admired by their Majesties. The Paiks danced their best and furnished a relief from the monotony of silent processions." This dance with sixty-four dancers divided into warring groups was meticulously choreographed with stylized movements drawn from the martial arts Pharikhanda/Sadhan and Paikali. The dance was rehearsed twice a day for six months. Most emphasis was laid on symmetry of movements. Special costumes and equipments were prepared for the dance.

As mentioned earlier, the early Chhau dances of Mayurbhanj were all of a martial character. Some of the names are revealing : 'Sandhamar' ('Masculine Valour'), 'Jhatak Bijuli' ('Flash of Lightning'), 'Paka Lanka' ('Red Chilli'), 'Nimapanda' ('Dance of a Warrior'), Akalgudum ('Baffle the Enemy'), 'Majamalum' ('Teaching a Lesson [to the enemy]') 'Dusman Pachhad' ('Pushing Back the Enemy'), 'Shumbha-Nishumbha' (after the demon fighters of Mahishasura), etc. Later, Krishna themes were introduced in the dance[10]. Some of the well-known Krishna dances are 'Ras', 'Nithur Kalia', 'Nisith Milan', 'Tamudia Krishna', 'Bal Krishna', 'Bansichori', etc. The music was based on Kirtan and Jhoomar. With the introduction of Vaishnava themes and episodes from mythology featuring female characters, the dance slowly mellowed to accept moods other than the martial. Special dance-movements were created for female roles, played however by males. In some dances songs were introduced, sung in the background, with the dancers interpreting with mimetic gestures. From this point, songs came to be used in Chhau performances.

Besides dances on Krishna themes and other mythological subjects, the Chhau of Mayurbhanj also drew upon 'contemporary' sources. An example is the play *Bidyasundar Pala*, popularized in the Jatra of Bengal by Gopal Dash of Orissa (Gopal Ude), a great Jatra actor and director. This love-story was introduced in Chhau in 1910. Dam Chandra Bhanja choreographed the dance with the help of his ustads. It was presented the same year during Chaitra Parva. Bisweswar Bhanja and Dinabandhu Behera, two great exponents of Mayurbhanj Chhau, danced the roles of Sundar and Vidya respectively[11]. This was a four-hour performance in the form of dance-drama. Perhaps this was the only dance of such duration which was never repeated.

After the death of Rama Chandra Bhanja, the state again came under the Court of Wards as the ruler's eldest son Purna Chandra was a minor. The annual grant of Rs. 2,000 to the two Sahis was discontinued at this time. Grants of only Rs 250 were given to each Sahi to keep the annual celebrations of Chaitra Parva going. Suddenly all the interest and the efforts in the growth and development of Chhau dance declined. For eight years the dance remained dormant in Mayurbhanj.

Purna Chandra Bhanja was installed on the throne on 13 November 1920. Like his father, and his grandfather, he was keenly interested in Chhau, and his liberal patronage revived the dance in the state. But like the previous rulers of Mayurbhanj, Purna Chandra was a jealous guardian of the art, and never allowed it to be exhibited outside the territory except on very special occasions. On one such occasion a Chhau performance was presented at Cuttack. The Raja of Dhenkanal, who watched this performance, took a fancy to the dance and was able to lure away two of the participating ustads and a music-teacher to Dhenkanal, to start a Chhau company there. Purna Chandra was shocked and infuriated by this betrayal by his artists, and immediately ordered the closure of the Chhau akhadas of Mayurbhanj. The dance suffered another jolt by this mishap.

Purna Chandra died quite suddenly on 21 April 1928, when he was only twenty-nine, in Bombay, where he had been to attend a princes' conference. Being childless, he was succeeded by his younger brother Pratap Chandra Bhanja in 1930–31[12]; the latter was the ruler of the state till its merger with the Indian Union.

Maharaja Pratap Chandra's period may be called the golden era of Mayurbhanj Chhau. Immediately after his accession he enhanced the annual grants to the Sahis to Rs 5,000. A manager was appointed in each Sahi to supervise training, rehearsals, and presentation of dances during Chaitra Parva. To help and advise the managers two committees of knowledgeable persons were formed. There were regular rehearsals from October up to Chaitra Parva in April. In the morning the dancers engaged in physical exercises, followed by dance practice; training and rehearsals were held in the evening. Up to Chaitra Parva the dancers lived celibate lives and were not allowed to go home; they slept in the akhadas. Dancers, drummers, musicians, and ustads were given nourishing food. The Maharaja used to take keen interest in the whole process of training, and personally looked after the needs of the dancers. All the artists were given free medical aid.

In order to be in constant touch with the dancers, Pratap Chandra appointed some of them in state and domestic service. For example Ananta Charan Sai (Kadu Babu), the ustad of Dakshin Sahi, was in charge of the palace lights. Sambhunath Jena, an excellent performer, was appointed caretaker of Ranibag (Queen's Gardens) on the banks of the river Budhabalang. Hem Behera, another star performer, was in charge of agricultural operations[13]. A number of other dancers were also appointed in various positions. There was also a regular salary for dancers, musicians, and ustads in the Sahis.

Qualitatively, the Maharaja made efforts to enrich the technique and style of Chhau

dance. He engaged a team of ustads and musicians to work on the music of the various dances. As he was not satisfied with the tunes played on the Mahuri, the indigenous variety of the Shehnai, he introduced a forty-member Western band with a qualified Russian bandmaster. Music was also freely borrowed from Hindustani and Odissi music, Kirtan, and local folk-songs, especially Jhoomar.

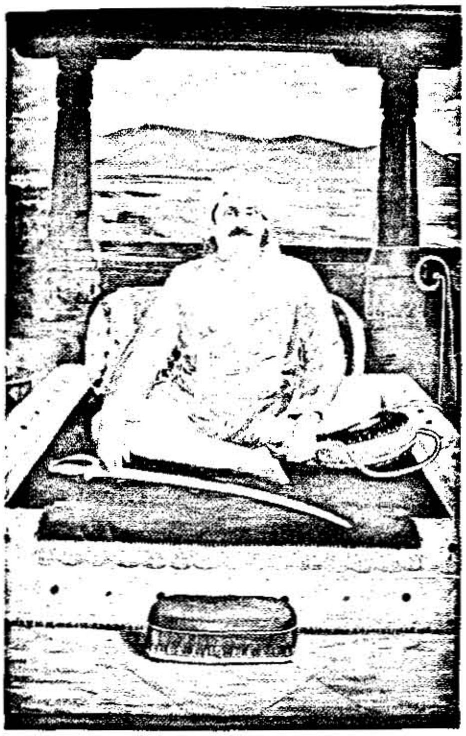
Pratap Chandra made a serious attempt to build up the dance on classical lines. It was in his time that the three *layas* (tempi)—*vilambit*, *madhya*, and *drut*—were introduced for the three stages of the dance: *chali*, *nata*, and *natki*. He even made an attempt to introduce *mudras* or hand-gestures in the dance. At his request the Maharaja of Travancore sent Keshava Das, a Kathakali guru, to teach mudras to the dancers. Keshava Das came to Baripada in 1939 and stayed there for six months. Thus mudras were introduced in dances like 'Geeta', 'Garudavahan', 'Odia', 'Rasalata', etc. In the first two dances there were no songs, but in the two others there was *abhinaya* to songs as practised in Odissi dance today. Each dance of this kind was of more than thirty minutes' duration. In 1942 Pratap Chandra invited Simkie, Uday Shankar's dance partner, to Baripada. She stayed there for six months teaching choreography. When she left for Calcutta, some dancers were sent to her for further training[14].

Chhau Presentation in the Palace

As mentioned earlier, Chhau dance in Mayurbhanj used to be presented ceremonially in the palace for three nights during the Chaitra Parva festival, as also on special occasions in honour of royal guests. The site of these performances was the second courtyard of the palace which had an earthen stage three-and-a-half feet high. It was built in Maharaja Pratap Chandra's time, probably in the 1930s[15]. The stage was fitted with a screen and had two gates at the back for the dancers of the two Sahis. The gates were decorated with coloured lights for performances. The performance-area was covered with soft earth on which water mixed with oil was sprinkled so that there would be no dust during a performance. On the right of the stage was a raised platform for the Maharaja and his guests[16].

The process of making the stage ready for performance, the decoration of the gates, etc., would begin a few days before the performances on Chaitra Parva. This process would start with the ritual of *jarjara puja*[17], the planting of a flagstaff (with a red flag) on the stage on an auspicious day chosen in consultation with representatives of the two Sahis. The purpose of this ritual, witnessed in several performance contexts in India, is to clear obstacles and ward off evil[18].

On the first day of performances during Chaitra Parva, the dancers, musicians, and ustads prayed to Bhairava in the morning in the small shrines in their akhadas, and made an offering of red cloth to the deity. The ustads then tied the *nada*, a string from the same cloth, on their pupils' wrists. Everyone wore new coloured dhotis.

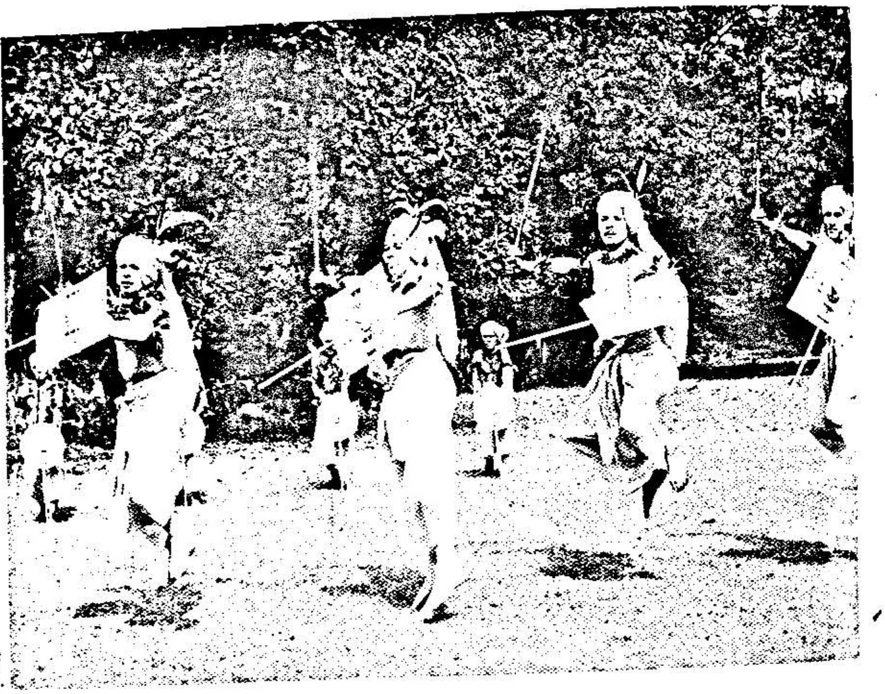








Clockwise (from top): Krushna Chandra Bhanja, Rama Chandra Bhanja, Purna Chandra Bhanja, Pratap Chandra Bhanja. Reproduced from photographs of durbar portraits in the collection of L.N. Das, Baripada, whose generous loan of all the photographs published with this article is gratefully acknowledged. L.N. Das also shared the information in the photo legends.

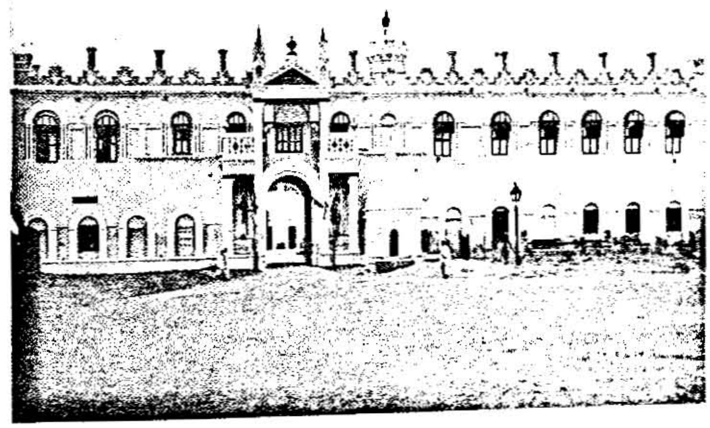


A martial dance (date uncertain).



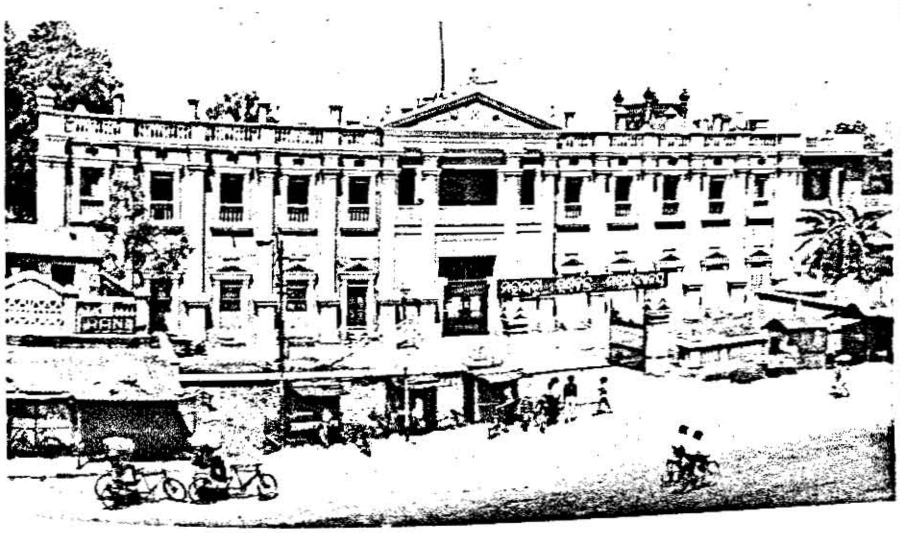
The Chhau performance presented by Rama Chandra Bhanja in the Calcutta pageant in honour of George V, 1912.



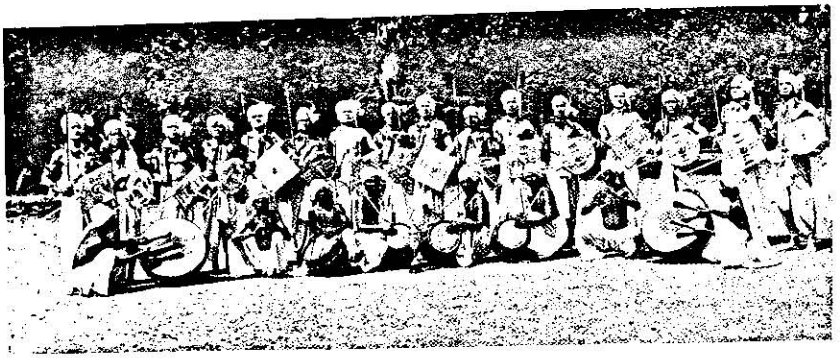


Top left: The Mayurbhanj state crest. The *chhatra* (umbrella) was added by Pratap Chandra Bhanja.

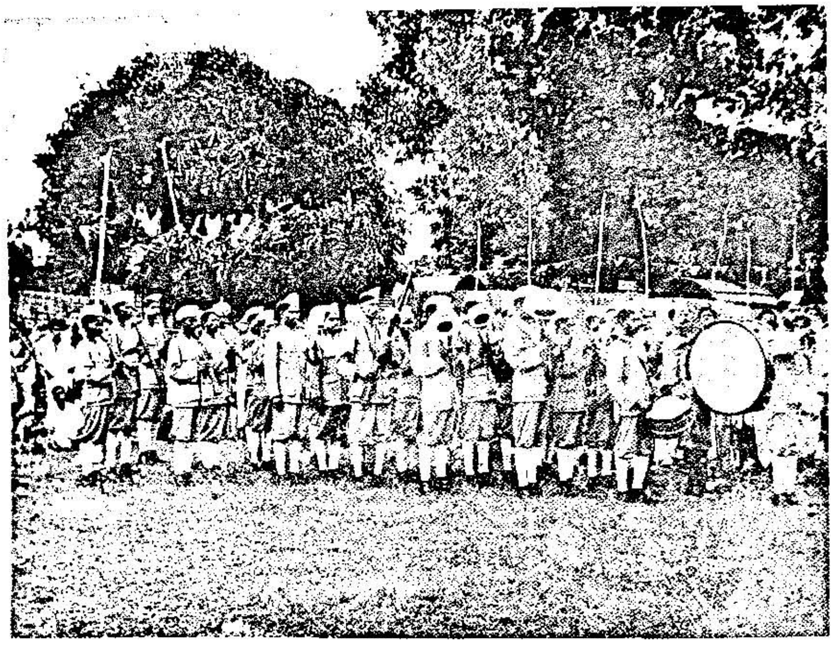
Top: An old picture of the courtyard of the Baripada palace where Chhau was performed.



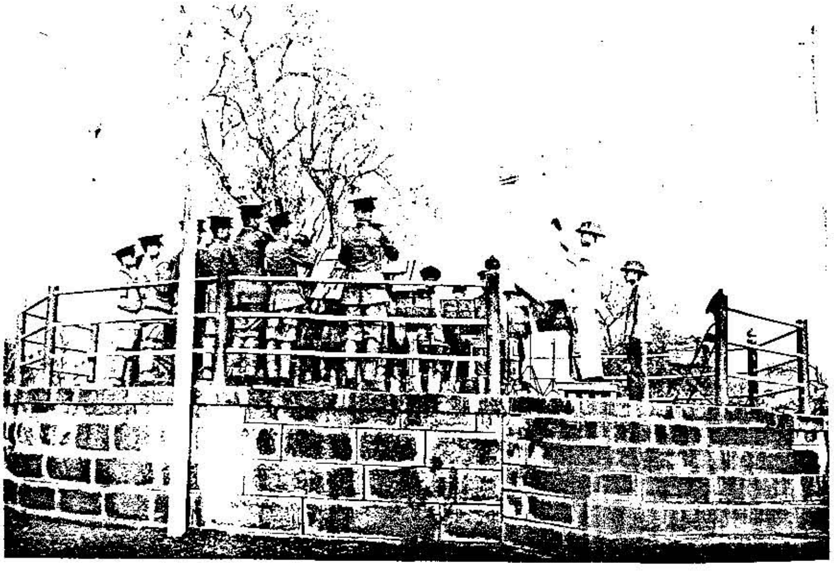
Left: The palace today—an exterior view. The signboard is of the Maharaja Purna Chandra College housed there.



A martial-dance group (date uncertain).



The Mayurbhanj state band established by Pratap Chandra Bhanja.



The state band, here conducted by Kartik Pani, performing on the bandstand in Baripada, 1948. The bandstand is part of a children's park today.

In the afternoon the dancers offered worship to goddesses Ambika and Kitchakeswari in their respective shrines[19]. Thereafter loose earth from the Bhairavthan (the seat of Bhairava) was sprinkled over the performance-area, and all the participants walked over the stage and procceded to the green-room for make-up. This ritual was known as *asarmada*—ceremonial walking on the stage.

As the evening advanced drums heralded the big event thrice, at intervals of an hour. In this drumming only Dhumsas—the big kettledrums—were played, with two blunt sticks. The drums reverberated all over town, slowly drawing people to the palace.

When the Maharaja arrived with his guests, 'Dhumal' was played on all the drums and wind instruments. This is a sudden burst of intense drumming with melodic accompaniment, serving as a prelude to the performance. (It is also prevalent in West Bengal and Assam, where it is called 'Dhumal' and 'Dhyamali' respectively.) 'Dhumal' was followed by 'Joodan', a piece also played on all the instruments, starting in a slow tempo and rising to a crescendo. After this came 'Rangbaja', a beautiful musical piece creating uncanny rhythms on Dhols played by a group of Dhol-players[20].

The stage performance commenced with 'Kaji-paji', an act by two clowns named Abid Hussain and Karim Hussain. Abid Hussain, the Kaji (kazi), would recite in pidgin Hindustani:

Apna desh chhodkar sath me Paji liya
Karachi hoke Seraikellame ake rang jamaya
Uhan jab achha na lagi to age paon badhaya
Chalte chalte Mayurbhanj me ek debko paya
Unse puchha kya nam hai apka? Bhairav nam bataya
Salam karke hum dono ka maksad unhe sunaya
Pura hoga Mayurbhanj me kahake gayab hua . . .
Is nach me pahale dhumal phir uphli aur baja
Dharan tabka aur salami samjhe to Mayurbhanj ke maharaja.[21]

After this item the dances began. Both the Sahis performed alternately. The performance went on till daybreak. The Maharaja, his family and guests attended the performances all the three nights. Around midnight the performance was suspended for some time to allow the *bhaktas* (devotees) to visit the palace with the Jatraghat and Nisaghat (pitchers holding holy water; the ritual is connected with Shaiva worship). They were received by the Maharaja and honoured by the dancers, who fell in line and performed a dance with two steps to the accompaniment of simple music. Then the *pat-bhaktas* (chief devotees) representing the two Sahis sang in praise of the king and wished him a long and happy life. The dances resumed after the devotees had left the palace. On the last day of Chaitra Parva all the dancers and musicians joined the devotees in a dance. The water from the pitchers was then distributed to all.

Pratap Chandra used to form a committee of judges, with himself as chairman, to evaluate performances at Chaitra Parva. Marks were given for each performance, and the Sahi getting the higher marks was declared the winner of the trophy instituted for the festival. This was a silver trophy awarded by the Raja of Talcher, a princely state of Orissa. Other princes attending Chaitra Parva would award cash prizes, gold medals, etc., to the performers with whom they were pleased.

Pratap Chandra would introduce new dances at Chaitra Parva every year. Most of the dances created during this period (1930–1947) were dance-dramas involving a number of artists. This format was perhaps inspired by exposure to dance on the stage in Calcutta, where Pratap Chandra would take his ustads and artists whenever there was a good performance, Indian or other. Thus there was free borrowing from other dances, but everything was moulded in the form of Chhau. Some of the most beautiful group-dances of Mayurbhanj, like 'Kiratarjun', 'Maya Shabari', 'Garudavahan', 'Nabagraha', 'Dasavatar', 'Dasabhuja', 'Matrupuja', 'Kach-Debjani', etc., were created in this period. Solo pieces like 'Shabartoka' and 'Nataraj', and dances with two dancers such as 'Geeta' and 'Premik-premika', are also noteworthy creations of this new era[22].

Stoppage of Royal Patronage

In 1947, when India became independent, Maharaja Pratap Chandra chose not to merge with the Indian Union; instead, he handed over power to a popular government[23]. The merger, by main force, eventually took place on 1 January 1949[24]. As the Chhau establishment in Mayurbhanj was wholly financed by the state, and was under the personal care and patronage of the Maharaja, the two groups of Uttar Sahi and Dakshin Sahi were practically orphaned by this turn of events.

When the funds stopped, the ustads and dancers of Mayurbhanj went to meet the Maharaja and appeal to him for continued subsistence support. This meeting was arranged in the palace[25]. Though a chair was placed for him, it is said that Pratap Chandra sat on the floor with the artists. The artists asked him what they should do in the changed circumstances since they knew nothing but dancing. Pratap Chandra asked them in turn what he should do when his state was gone. When some artists appealed for substantial financial support to continue the tradition of Chhau, he pointed out to them the impossibility of this proposition. He is said to have asked: 'For how many days a year were you doing akhada practice?' 'For six months', was the answer. 'For how many days were you dancing?' 'For three days', the artists said. At which Pratap Chandra said, 'For three days of quality performance you practised for six long months. Can you keep up this practice? Only then can you keep up the tradition of Chhau.' This was apparently an emotional moment in the meeting because it was realized that Chhau in Mayurbhanj, and the pageantry surrounding Chaitra Parva, would never be the same again.

Of more immediate concern was the livelihood of the artists, and the Maharaja

forwarded an appeal from the dancers to the Chief Minister of Mayurbhanj, Sarat Chandra Das, recommending some form of state subsidy for Chhau. The Chief Minister formed a committee of four persons, including himself[26], to work out a scheme for the survival of the art. This committee was of the opinion that a corpus fund of six lakhs rupees should be created by the government, interest on which would pay for Chhau. Three of the four members—those belonging to the Mayurbhanj government—signed a recommendation to this effect. The fourth, an Executive Magistrate, withheld his consent. Consequently the recommendation was not implemented, and was useless after the merger[27].

After the merger of Mayurbhanj, Pratap Chandra Bhanja left Baripada for good and lived in Calcutta, where he died on 15 July 1965. The dancers in his state and domestic service were retrenched. Most of them took to other work, and all of a sudden the celebrations at Chaitra Parva stopped. The akhadas humming with activity became defunct, and Baripada town was lifeless.

Mayurbhanj Chhow Nrutya Pratisthan

With the stoppage of royal patronage and the failure of the attempt to secure government support for Chhau, the dance in Mayurbhanj started languishing. At this juncture a few Chhau enthusiasts got together and prepared a plan to revive and preserve the dance, this time without state patronage. They formed the Mayurbhanj Chhow Nrutya Pratisthan in 1949 and invited ustads, dancers, and musicians to join the organization. The leading part in this venture was played by Bhabanisankar Das and Ramesh Chandra Mohapatra. The ustad who helped them most was Ananta Charan Sài, who was later (in 1971) honoured with the first Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for Mayurbhanj Chhau. With a small group of dancers, they organized a repertory and presented a few programmes before state dignitaries to draw their attention to the need for preservation of the dance. At that time Dr Harekrushna Mahatab was the Chief Minister of Orissa.

One such programme was presented at Puri in 1950, in honour of C. Rajagopalachari, Governer-General of India. According to the official itinerary, Rajaji was to watch the dance for fifteen minutes[28], but he was so fascinated that he sat through the full three-hour programme consisting of several dances. An appeal was made to him for support for the dance, and at his instance Dr Mahatab sanctioned an annual grant of Rs 10,000 to the Pratisthan. With this grant performances during Chaitra Parva were revived in Mayurbhanj. For the first time, the venue was not the palace. Though the event lacked lustre and princely grandeur, the tradition of Chhau at Chaitra Parva survived.

Subsequently the Orissa government reorganized the Pratisthan, merging it with the Sahi akhadas, which were also revived. The Collector of Mayurbhanj became its ex-officio President and the Deputy Collector the Secretary. With bureaucrats as office-bearers the Pratisthan today is not engaged in much meaningful activity except for organizing the annual Chaitra Parva celebrations. The Sahis are not functioning well as

they do not have dancers and musicians on staff. At Chaitra Parva, 'freelance' artists of Mayurbhanj are engaged to dance under the banner of the two Sahis.

The Pratisthan maintained a full repertory from 1968 to 1985. Meticulously trained by Ananta Charan Sai and Lalmohan Patra, the group had brilliant dancers like Surmohan Ghadei, Atul Chandra Dhada, Ajay Baitha, Srikanta Dhada, etc. The group presented many memorable performances within and outside the country under the leadership of its Director Sadhan Chandra Dey. This was the only repertory apart from the old Sahis which maintained the standards of the Chhau dance of Mayurbhanj.

However, the stoppage of royal patronage had another effect. It helped many of the village groups to grow. In princely Mayurbhanj no ustad was allowed to teach a group outside the Sahis. Therefore the village groups continued to perform the rudimentary Chhau—Amdalia-Jamdalia, Sadhan/Pharikhanda, Paikali, etc. These groups could now procure the services of ustads and senior dancers of the Sahis who were out of work. The village groups thus picked up the thematic dances of Baripada. Over the past fifty years the number of village groups has grown enormously; there are more than a hundred groups today. Though some of them receive annual grants from the Department of Culture, Government of Orissa[29], most are run by the villagers themselves. Every year after the harvest they invite an ustad and learn a few dances. Many of these groups participate in competitions organized by the Mayurbhanj Chhow Nrutya Pratisthan at various places in the district before the festival of Chaitra Parva. On the first night of Chaitra Parva select village groups are given a chance to perform. This has continued for over two decades now.

All the village groups have ceremonial performances in their villages, mostly on the occasion of Raja Sankranti, an important agricultural festival of Orissa held in June. These performances have no connection with any kind of religious ritual. So it's heartening to see Muslim boys dancing the roles of Radha and Krishna and other characters from Hindu mythology.[30]

(This is the second part of a three-part article.)

NOTES

1. This inscription, preserved in the Orissa State Museum, is palaeographically dated *c*. A.D. 400.
2,3. See *Mayurbhanj District Gazetteer*, Government of Orissa, 1967.
4. Dibakar Bhanja. 'Mayurbhanjare Chhau Nrutyar Bibaran' (Oriya, Description of the Chhau Dance of Mayurbhanj), *Bhanja Pradeep*, 1934.
5. 'Sahi'/'Sahis' is used synonymously for the akhadas of the two Sahis.
6. *Mayurbhanj District Gazetteer*, Government of Orissa, 1967.
7. B.P. Lenka. *Maharaja Sri Rama Chandra Bhanja Deo* (Oriya), 1993.
8. Ibid.

9. The book was published by Mayurbhanj State in 1918.

10. Originally the rulers of Mayurbhanj were Shaivites. Later, they converted to Vaishnavism and built a number of Radha-Krishna temples all over their territory. Paramananda Acharya, an archaeologist, writes: "Rasikananda, a disciple of Sri Chaitanya, made Maharaja Vaidyanatha Bhanja of Mayurbhanj his disciple at Baripada in 1610 A.D., . . . and soon after the image of Krishna, named Gobinda of Gopiballavpur, was married with an image of Radha as the daughter of the Maharaja." (*Studies of Orissan History, Archaeology and Archives*, p. 67, Orissa State Museum.) After Vaidyanatha Bhanja, all other rulers liberally patronized Vaishnava holy men and religious institutions.

    It is said that Maharaja Rama Chandra had started living the life of an ascetic soon after his wife's death in 1902. He then became a disciple of the Vaishnava guru Sri Rama Das, who also had a group of Ras performers. The group used to perform in the palace for months under the patronage of Maharaja Rama Chandra. It is during this period (roughly 1902 to 1910) that dances on Krishna themes were created in Mayurbhanj.

11. The information is based on a programme leaflet published on the occasion.

12. Pratap Chandra Bhanja was admitted to the Chamber of Princes as a full member by the Viceroy of India under Act 2(ii) of the constitution of the Chamber of Princes in 1930–31. This accounts for the gap between Purna Chandra's death and Pratap Chandra's accession.

13. The information on employment of artists is based on the author's personal knowledge.

14. Madan Mohan Lenka, who was honoured with the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for Chhau in 1987, was one of the dancers trained by Simkie during this period.

15. The following descriptions of preparation of the stage and the ritual of *jarjara puja*, as well as performances in the palace on Chaitra Parva, relate to Pratap Chandra Bhanja's period.

16. Both the stage and the platform were demolished by the authorities of the Maharaja Purna Chandra College, which came to be housed in the Baripada palace, in 1960. A cemented structure has come up there for college functions.

17. This ritual refers to the description of *natyotpatti* (origin of drama) in the first chapter of the *Natyashastra*. According to this narrative, when Swati and Narada with the help of *gandharvas* and *apsaras* were performing a play on the occasion of the Indradhwaja festival, in which the victory of the gods over the demons was shown, the demons present attacked the performers and the play was disrupted. Enraged at this, Indra attacked the demons with his flagstaff (*indradhwaja*) and drove them away. The gods then named the flagstaff *jarjara*.

18. The introduction of jarjara puja, and of the three layas and mudras in Chhau, may be seen as part of Pratap Chandra's effort to build up the dance on 'classical' lines. It connects with similar contemporary sanskritic movements in other Indian arts, e.g., Bharatanatyam (where Bharata's name was invoked to redeem, and rename, the dance of the Devadasis, Sadir.)—*Ed.*

19. The Kitchakeswari shrine is in the palace compound; the Ambika temple is outside.

20. This description of musical preliminaries is based on the author's own observation.

21. A rough translation of this rhyme would be: 'Leaving my own land in the company of Paji [Rascal]/ I arrived at Seraikella via Karachi, and there entertained / When I didn't like it there any more, I moved ahead/And got to Mayurbhanj, where I found a god/I asked him, What's your name? Bhairav he said/Saluting him, I told him our purpose / [Our purpose] would be met in Mayurbhanj, he said, and vanished.../In this [Chhau] dance there's first *dhumal* and then *uphli* and *baja / Dharan*, *tabka*, and *salami* are understood [well] by the Mayurbhanj maharaja.' Note that the Kaji, an Islamic judge and ecclesiast,

arrives at Mayurbhanj *via* Seraikella *and* Karachi from his native land (probably further west) in the company of Paji, and there finds the god Bhairav who promises them fulfilment of their wishes, (because?) the Mayurbhanj maharaja understands the Chhau dance well. Note also that the language is Hindustani, not the local Oriya.

It's not known when 'Kaji-Paji' went out of practice. L.N. Das, a Chhau archivist and enthusiast of Baripada, has this to say about the act: "One interesting item of Chhau dance, known as Kaji-Paji . . . has been out of practice since long. Kaji-Paji means two jesters. Kaji comes from one Sahi and Paji from another. The Chhau dance starts up about 10 p.m. but people start gathering from 7 p.m. So it becomes imperative to keep such a huge crowd in good humour. At the outset, Kaji-Paji appear on the stage with the drumming of Nagra. They appear in funny dresses, wearing tattered and soiled clothes, worn-out shoes, waste paper and leaves. They keep the audience engaged with their wit and humour and sometimes with obscene folk songs . . . They are never a part of the actual dance but merely come to engage the audience till the beginning of the show." (From 'Chhau Dance of Mayurbhanj', unpublished documentation sponsored by Sangeet Natak Akademi.)

In his documentation, L.N. Das also mentions that 'Kaji-Paji' was recreated for an episode of the television serial *Tana-bana*, which was shot in the Mayurbhanj palace and telecast on 24 July 1992. An (unprintable) photocopy of a still from the serial in this documentation shows one of the characters wearing a head-dress resembling a dunce cap, and both in short dhotis and motley garments.

We invite research in this topic, and similar topics of social interest.—*Ed.*

22. The information on new dances during the period 1930–1947 is based on programme leaflets published at Chaitra Parva.
23. The 'popular' government of Mayurbhanj was headed by Sarat Chandra Das as Chief Minister. The next part of this article will carry a more detailed note on how this government was formed.—*Ed.*
24. The transition to a 'popular' government was not accepted by the Government of India. The Mayurbhanj government was dismissed and Maharaja Pratap Chandra was forced to sign the Mayurbhanj Merger Agreement in Delhi on 17 October 1948 whereby the state would become a part of the Indian Union on 1 January 1949. This agreement was signed by M.K. Vellodi, Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of States, on behalf of the Governor-General of India.
25. The proceedings of this meeting were narrated to the author by Ananta Charan Sai, who was among those present. The meeting took place before the Mayurbhanj merger.
26. Besides the Chief Minister, this committee consisted of Bidyadhar Mohapatra and Maheswar Nayak, Ministers in the Mayurbhanj government, and Radhagovinda Das, Executive Magistrate.
27. The relevant records are in the Record Room of the Baripada Collectorate.
28. Itineraries of state dignitaries attending public performances haven't changed since 1950—*Ed.*
29. For over a decade, the Department of Culture, Orissa, has been making grants amounting to Rs 2 lakhs a year to Chhau organizations. This includes the grant for the Mayurbhanj Chhow Nrutya Pratisthan.
30. More rigorous research is needed in the history of the Chhau dance of Mayurbhanj, under its rulers and after, and with reference to the social bases of the art. We invite suggestions and contributions.—*Ed.*